



NEWS RELEASE

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Feb. 12, 2019

District Attorney Jackie Lacey Lauds New Unit for Immigration Fraud Convictions

Los Angeles County District Attorney Jackie Lacey today lauded the work of the office's Notario Fraud Unit, which is dedicated to prosecuting immigration fraud and the unlawful practice of law.

"Our great diversity attracts more than our share of people seeking to manipulate and cheat some of our newest residents out of their hard-earned money," District Attorney Lacey said. "As a result, many of our neighbors may be more likely to become victims of fraud and other financial crimes due to their cultural backgrounds and economic situations."

"Everyone – regardless of their immigration status – deserves to be protected against crime and to receive justice when they have been victimized," District Attorney Lacey continued. "I will aggressively prosecute anyone who preys upon another person because of their language, cultural differences or their residency status."

The Notario Fraud Unit prosecutes cases involving immigration fraud and the unlicensed practice of law by con artists who often collect high fees from victims without delivering any services.

The term "notario" often is used interchangeably with "attorney" in some Latin American countries. In California, it is illegal for immigration consultants to call themselves "notarios" because it implies that they are licensed attorneys.

The unit addresses these issues not only among Los Angeles County's large Latino population, but in all of its diverse communities of different cultures, languages and backgrounds.

The need for this specialized approach is particularly acute here, where more than a third of the county's 10 million-plus residents were born outside the United States and at least 185 languages are spoken at home, according to the latest U.S. Census Bureau data.

The Notario Fraud Unit is staffed by two deputy district attorneys and an investigator under the Consumer Protection Division. They conduct public outreach and education, participate in immigration task forces, draft legislation to better protect consumers and conduct training for prosecutors, law enforcement personnel and consumer advocates.

The District Attorney's Office has obtained convictions in several major notario fraud and immigration scam cases in recent years. Those convicted include:

- Romina Aida Zadorian, 49, of Montebello, claimed to be an attorney or government worker and charged her victims for immigration services they never received. [She was convicted](#) last week of grand theft, extortion and false government documents. She was sentenced to 15 years in state prison and ordered to pay more than \$660,000 in restitution to her 91 victims.
- Gregory Chavez, 55, of Porter Ranch, posed as a law enforcement officer and promised the families of immigration detainees that he could get their loved ones out of custody for a price. In July 2017, [Chavez was sentenced](#) to 10 years in county jail and five years of mandatory supervision. He also was ordered to pay \$549,000 in restitution to his 102 victims.
- Augusto "Tito" Gonzalez De La Cruz, 58, of Upland, said he was an immigration attorney and promised clients that he could expedite the processing of visas, resident alien cards and citizenship petitions for them. In October, [Gonzalez De La Cruz was sentenced](#) to five years in county jail and four years of mandatory supervision. He also was ordered to pay \$400,000 in restitution to 35 victims.
- Dalila Moreno, 64, of East Los Angeles, told her victims that she worked for the government or had special government connections. She promised to expedite the processing of immigration paperwork. She also forged visas and created false passport stamps. In December, [Moreno was sentenced](#) to nine years in county jail and three years of mandatory supervision. She also was ordered to pay \$303,500 in restitution to her 32 victims.

The Notario Fraud Unit builds on the District Attorney's Office's legacy of aggressively prosecuting consumer protection cases.

To better protect the public from financial fraud, District Attorney Lacey began a public outreach effort in May 2015 to warn people about scams and teach them how to avoid becoming victims.

The twice-monthly Fraud Alerts are shared through news releases, videos and social media. Nearly 6,000 printed fliers are distributed monthly to senior centers and other public locations throughout Los Angeles County.

Next month, District Attorney Lacey is bringing together prosecutors, law enforcement personnel, elected officials and community-based advocates to discuss ways they can work together to protect consumers from devastating financial losses due to criminal activity.

Anyone who believes they may be a victim of immigration fraud is encouraged to call the Notario Fraud Unit at 213-257-2450.

[About the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office](#)

Los Angeles County District Attorney Jackie Lacey leads the largest local prosecutorial office in the nation. Her staff of nearly 1,000 attorneys, 300 investigators and 800 support staff members is dedicated to protecting our community through the fair and ethical pursuit of justice and the safeguarding of crime victims' rights.